



## National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators

### CODE OF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

#### ■ *Preamble*

Many persons who come before the courts are non- or limited-English speakers. The function of court interpreters and translators is to remove the language barrier to the extent possible, so that such persons' access to justice is the same as that of similarly-situated English speakers for whom no such barrier exists. The degree of trust that is placed in court interpreters and the magnitude of their responsibility necessitate high, uniform ethical standards that will both guide and protect court interpreters in the course of their duties as well as uphold the standards of the profession as a whole.

While many ethical decisions are straightforward, no code of ethics can foresee every conceivable scenario; court interpreters cannot mechanically apply abstract ethical principles to every situation that may arise. This Code is therefore intended not only to set forth fundamental ethical precepts for court interpreters to follow, but also to encourage them to develop their own, well-informed ethical judgment.

#### ■ *Applicability*

All NAJIT members are bound to comply with this Code.

#### **Canon 1. Accuracy**

Source-language speech should be faithfully rendered into the target language by conserving all the elements of the original message while accommodating the syntactic and semantic patterns of the target language. The rendition should sound natural in the target language, and there should be no distortion of the original message through addition or omission, explanation or paraphrasing. All hedges, false starts and repetitions should be conveyed; also, English words mixed into the other language should be retained, as should culturally-bound terms which have no direct equivalent in English, or which may have more than one meaning. The register, style and tone of the source language should be conserved.

Guessing should be avoided. Court interpreters who do not hear or understand what a speaker has said should seek clarification. Interpreter errors should be corrected for the record as soon as possible.

#### **Canon 2. Impartiality and Conflicts of Interest**

Court interpreters and translators are to remain impartial and neutral in proceedings where they serve, and must maintain the

appearance of impartiality and neutrality, avoiding unnecessary contact with the parties. Court interpreters and translators shall abstain from comment on matters in which they serve. Any real or potential conflict of interest shall be immediately disclosed to the Court and all parties as soon as the interpreter or translator becomes aware of such conflict of interest.

#### **Canon 3. Confidentiality**

Privileged or confidential information acquired in the course of interpreting or preparing a translation shall not be disclosed by the interpreter without authorization.

#### **Canon 4. Limitations of Practice**

Court interpreters and translators shall limit their participation in those matters in which they serve to interpreting and translating, and shall not give advice to the parties or otherwise engage in activities that can be construed as the practice of law.

#### **Canon 5. Protocol and Demeanor**

Court interpreters shall conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the standards and protocol of the court, and shall perform their duties as unobtrusively as possible. Court interpreters are to use the same grammatical person as the speaker. When it becomes necessary to assume a primary role in the communication, they must make it clear that they are speaking for themselves.

#### **Canon 6. Maintenance and Improvement of Skills and Knowledge**

Court interpreters and translators shall strive to maintain and improve their interpreting and translation skills and knowledge.

#### **Canon 7. Accurate Representation of Credentials**

Court interpreters and translators shall accurately represent their certifications, accreditations, training and pertinent experience.

#### **Canon 8. Impediments to Compliance**

Court interpreters and translators shall bring to the Court's attention any circumstance or condition that impedes full compliance with any Canon of this Code, including interpreter fatigue, inability to hear, or inadequate knowledge of specialized terminology, and must decline assignments under conditions that make such compliance patently impossible.